

FORT TEJON STATE HISTORICAL MONUMENT



FORT TEJON



History of Fort Tejon State Monument

Fort Tejon is one of California's outstanding Historical Landmark sites. In the official State register it is Number 129. Without question this old post is the foremost remaining evidence in central California of the early American occupation period. Fort Tejon was established by the United States Army on August 10, 1854, and was abandoned ten years later on September 11, 1864. Located in Grapevine Canyon, Kern County, on Highway 99, it is 36 miles south of Bakersfield and 77 miles north of Los Angeles near the small community of Lebec. The present highway runs through the original area of the old Fort. Tejon is a Spanish and Indian word meaning badger, and was the name given to the original Mexican land grant on which the Fort stands by its first owner, Ignacio del Valle.

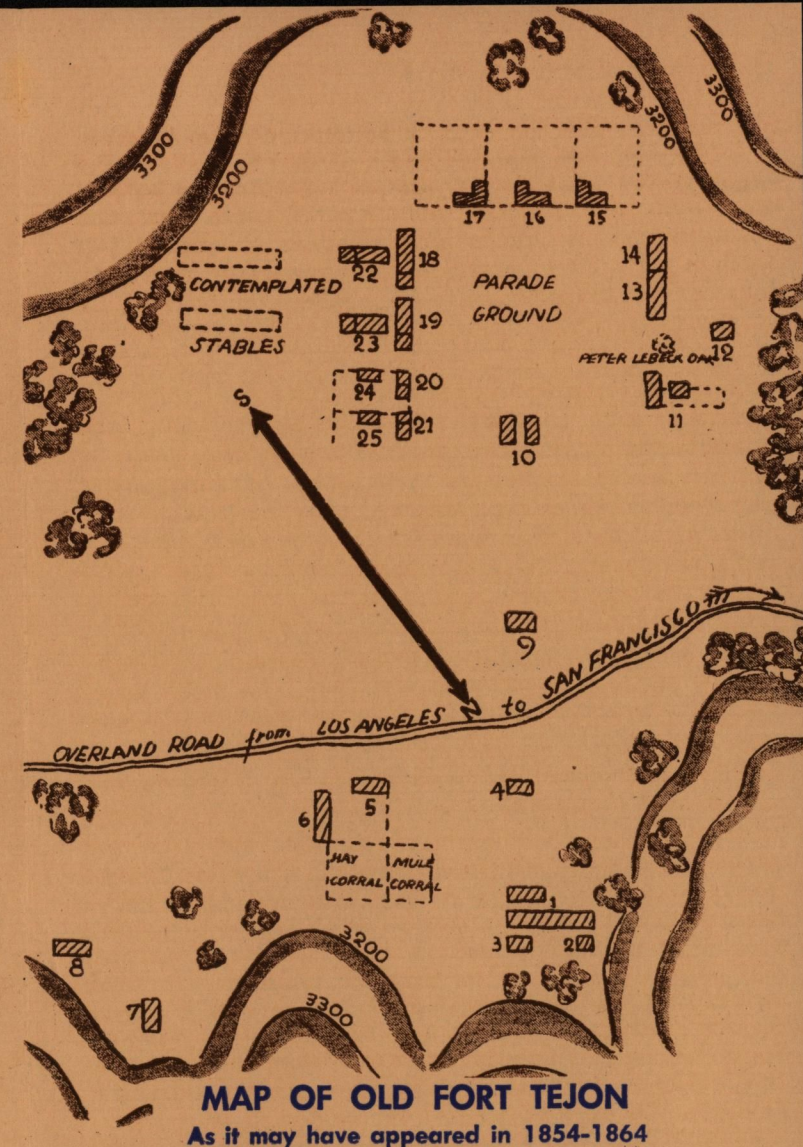
Why Fort Tejon Was Established

General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, in his capacity of Commissioner of Indian Affairs for California and Nevada, had recommended the establishment of a military post about fifteen miles southwest of the Sebastian Indian Reservation for the purpose of protecting the friendly Indians in the southern San Joaquin Valley. This particular location in the Canada de Las Uvas, or Grapevine Canyon, had been recommended to Indian Commissioner Beale by Lieutenants Williamson and Parke who had in 1853 surveyed all the passes out of the San Joaquin Valley in their search for a suitable railroad route through the mountains. The area was also considered advantageous since it strategically controlled an important pass through which stolen horses and cattle from the San Joaquin were driven to markets in the Southwest. The construction of a post on the Fort's present site was authorized by a special order of U. S. Army's Department

of the Pacific dated June 24, 1854. Six days later a detachment of Company A, 1st U. S. Dragoons, were ordered to this location under the command of First Lieutenant Thomas F. Castor. The dragoons arrived at the site of the Fort in two detachments. Lieutenant Castor and sixteen men arrived August 10, and another group arrived August 15 under Lieutenant Latimer. Both groups shortly thereafter came under the command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel B. L. Beall, and Fort Tejon then became regimental headquarters for the 1st Dragoons whose activities carried them over much of western America. It is an interesting fact that fifteen of the officers who served at Fort Tejon during its active period later became generals in the War Between the States. Eight served in the northern forces and seven in the southern. After its abandonment in 1864 by the Army, Fort Tejon became a part of E. F. Beale's great Tejon Ranch property, and the buildings of the post were used as residences, stables and sheds during subsequent years. Extensive bracing was installed by the Native Sons and Daughters in the fall of 1916. In 1939 the State of California through its Division of Beaches and Parks acquired title to five acres on which a number of the Fort's original buildings stood through a gift of the Tejon Ranch Company. During the winter of 1947-1948 a permanent State Park Ranger was placed in charge of Fort Tejon to begin the groundwork for future restoration. It was decided to begin with Barracks No. 1 whose outer walls were partially intact, and then proceed with the Officer Quarters at the upper end of the former parade ground. It has been hoped that at least 200 more acres of the original grounds will have been acquired by the time that a number of former building sites might be brought within the Monument's jurisdiction, thus becoming available for possible restoration. In 1949 an amicable association was established between the State Division of Beaches and Parks and the Kern County Historical Society through the latter's Fort Tejon Restoration Committee. This advisory committee of historically minded citizens is deeply concerned that the Fort be restored in an authentic fashion to its probable appearance as an active Army post of nearly a century ago. Numerous early day post artifacts have been unearthed by the workers and are being assembled by the staff for display in a small museum on the grounds.

An Important Place

Fort Tejon was the chief military, social and political center between Millerton and Los Angeles. At the height of its activity there were over twenty buildings standing at the post, and during 1858 a Butterfield Overland Mail station was established here on the line which extended from St. Louis to San Francisco.



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|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 STABLES | 12 BAKERY |
| 2 BLACKSMITH | 13 HOSPITAL |
| 3 GRANARY | 14 COMMISSARY |
| 4 BUTTERFIELD STAGE STATION | 15-16-17 OFFICERS' QUARTERS |
| 5 Q. M. STORE AND OFFICE | 18 BARRACK No. 2 |
| 6 SHOPS | 19 BARRACK No. 1 (Reconstructed) |
| 7 STORAGE | 20 OFFICERS' QUARTERS |
| 8 SUTLER'S STORE | 21 BAND AND ADJUTANT'S OFFICE |
| 9 NEW GUARD HOUSE | 22-23-24-25 MESS AND KITCHEN |
| 10 GUARD-PRISON | |
| 11 OFFICERS' QUARTERS | |

U. S. Army Camel Corps

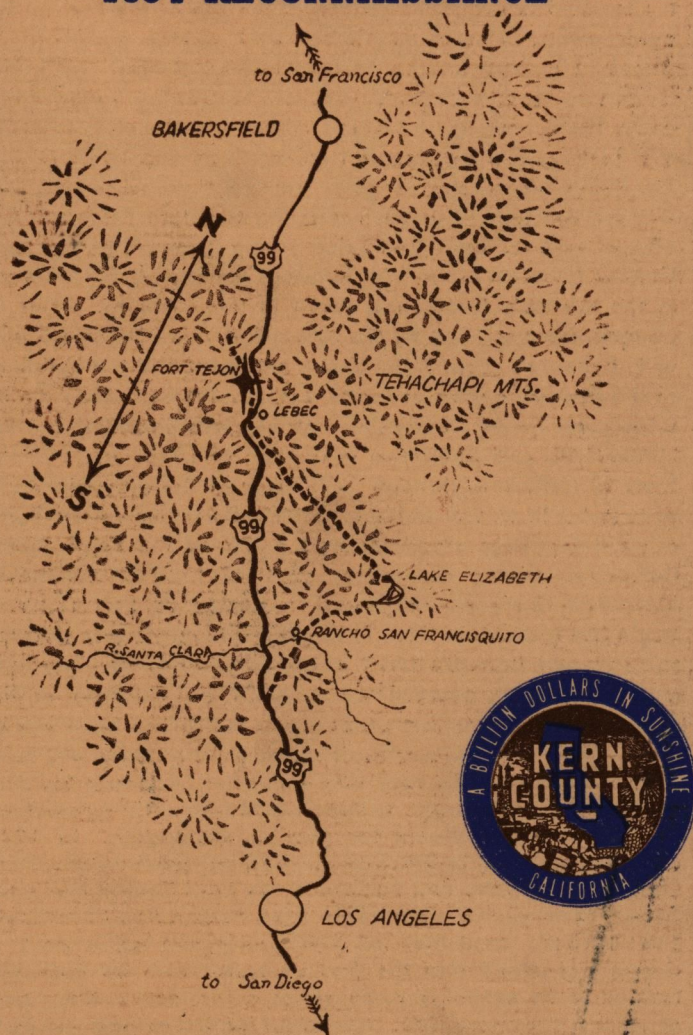
Under the direction of U. S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, camels were imported into this country in 1857. The army planned to use them in transporting supplies to isolated posts in the arid southwest, and for patrol use in controlling hostile Indians. A group of 28 camels was marched to Fort Tejon in California from near San Antonio, Texas, during the latter part of this same year. The wagon road survey party to which the camels were attached was under the direction of Edward Fitzgerald Beale. The splendid performance of the camels during this five months trek moved Beale to recommend to the War Department that further camels be purchased. However, various factors tended to discredit widespread use of camels in America. With the outbreak of the War Between the States and the subsequent construction of transcontinental railroads the camel experiment was discontinued by the army. Camels in varying numbers were stationed at Fort Tejon from November, 1857, until their removal to Los Angeles in June, 1861.

Peter le Beck Tree

Standing in the northwest corner of the parade ground, the Peter le Beck Tree commemorates Fort Tejon's most intriguing mystery. First mention of this tree occurs in R. S. Williamson's railroad route exploration report of 1853. He wrote that one of the oaks in Grapevine Canyon on the future site of the Fort had an inscription cut deeply into the wood. It read: "Peter le Beck, killed by a X bear, Oct. 17, 1837." Several interesting conjectures have been advanced as to the identity of the slain man whose body was exhumed and reburied in 1890 at the foot of this tree. It has been suggested that he was a French fur trapper in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company. Another fanciful tale has connected him with Napoleon's armed forces. However, despite considerable research, none has yet definitely established just who Peter le Beck was.



HISTORIC ROUTE—MAJ. DONALDSON'S 1854 RECONNAISSANCE



PARK ADMINISTRATION

This Monument is a unit of the State Park System, under jurisdiction of the California Park Commission. For further information, consult the resident ranger. For additional data on the units, write Division of Beaches and Parks, Department of Natural Resources, Sacramento, California.

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